Natural & Herbal Remedies for HEADACHES

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Natural & Herbal Remedies for Headaches

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Introduction

Have you ever felt like there were hundreds of tiny hammers beating on your skull? Like your head was being painfully squeezed in a vise? Or like someone was drilling a hole right through your brow and into your brain? Have you ever had such a headache that the slightest noise sounded like crashing cymbals reverberating through your brain? That your eyes became so exquisitely sensitive to light that you couldn't bear to open them?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you're in good company. Headaches — which can range from mild, dull aches that are merely annoying to debilitating pain that sends you to bed — are the most common health complaint in the United States. In fact, while headaches affect virtually every one of us at one time or another, an estimated 45 million of us suffer from *chronic* headaches, often with pain so severe that it interferes with our daily lives.

Though headaches are considered an entity unto themselves, they are often the result of another problem elsewhere in the body. Poor posture, eyestrain, sinus infection, hormonal changes, platelet abnormalities, and food sensitivities are just a few of the conditions that can cause head pain. Most pharmacies are well stocked with headache remedies. But unless the underlying cause of the headache is discovered and treated, these remedies will provide only temporary relief.

This bulletin will help you explore the reasons why you're experiencing them. Understanding the mechanisms of your headaches will help you to treat them effectively with dietary changes, lifestyle modifications, and gentle herbal remedies and perhaps banish headaches from your life forever.

Why Your Head Hurts

Headache pain originates from a network of nerves that run throughout your head and neck. The ends of these pain-sensitive nerves contain receptors — called *nociceptors* — that can be agitated by muscle tension, changes in blood flow, and chemical messengers released by other nerves or cells.

Once a nociceptor is agitated, it sends a message through the nerve fiber to your brain, signaling which part of the body needs help. The brain identifies the location of the pain by determining the nociceptor's location. Brain chemicals released by the nociceptor stimulate the immune system to create a localized inflammation. This action increases circulation to the area, which brings increased numbers of white blood cells, oxygen, and nutrients.

The sensation of pain is sometimes isolated to a small area, but it may also radiate along the path of the blood vessel, muscle, or nerve, creating widespread discomfort. It may be felt deep inside the head, in a small spot, or across a broad region. In general, the stronger the pain, the more dramatic the body's response, the greater the inflammation, and the larger the area of pain.

Sometimes there is no head pain at all — a phenomenon that may occur with migraines. Instead of head pain, other features of migraine may be present, such as visual disturbances, nausea, confusion, or dizziness. Some people have headaches that follow a particular pattern, while others never have the same kind of headache twice. The next time you get a headache, observe where it starts and how it develops to see if you can identify a pattern.

Should You Call a Doctor?

Most headaches can be safely treated at home. However, recurrent or chronic headaches may indicate another medical condition that needs to be treated. In rare cases, a headache may herald a serious condition that requires immediate medical attention. Headaches that

call for prompt medical care include:

- A headache that appears suddenly and is very severe
- A headache accompanied by seizures (convulsions), dizziness, or problems with balance
- A headache accompanied by personality changes, confusion, or loss of consciousness
- A headache accompanied by projectile vomiting
- A headache associated with neck or head trauma, such as a fall or a car accident
- A headache accompanied by eye or ear pain
- A headache associated with a fever and stiff neck
- A headache that prevents you from participating in normal everyday life
- A persistent headache in someone who rarely or never gets headaches
- Recurring headaches in children

The Different Types of Headaches

The exact mechanisms that cause headaches are not well understood. Historically, headaches have often been grouped into two basic categories: vascular headaches, which are caused by the alternating contraction (vasospasm) and expansion (vasodilation) of blood vessels in the head, and muscle contraction headaches, which are caused by prolonged muscle contraction or spasm. Some rare conditions such as a brain tumor or inflammation of the arteries that feed the facial nerves may also cause headaches.

More recent advances in headache research suggest that these categories are simplistic and not an entirely accurate way of explaining headaches. It's more likely that headaches are caused by a variety of factors that sometimes overlap and affect circulation, muscle tone, platelet activity, the release of brain chemicals, and inflammation.

That's why doctors today are likely to classify your headaches as *mixed*, which means that they're a combination of vascular and muscle contraction headaches, or as *traction* or *inflammatory*, which means that they're associated with diseases or structural abnormalities.

Muscular Contraction Headaches

Muscle tension is responsible for about 90 percent of all headaches. In this type of headache, pain originates from two mechanisms: nerve pain and nerve irritation. Nerve pain is the result of prolonged muscle contraction that constricts the surrounding nerves and activates the nociceptors. The nociceptors, in turn, alert the brain to pain and initiate an inflammatory cascade — a chain reaction of chemical activities that result in inflammation.

Nerve irritation, in contrast, is the result of restricted circulation, which inhibits the delivery of blood and oxygen to the tissues and prevents the transport of metabolic waste products away from those areas. This causes a buildup of pain-producing chemicals.

Conditions that contribute to muscle contraction headaches are

overreaction to stressful situations, prolonged sitting, poor posture, spinal misalignment, head or neck trauma, anxiety, insomnia, dehydration, depression, and strenuous or repetitive physical exertion.

The headache begins in the shoulders, neck, or back of the head and spreads outward with a dull, constant pain that may feel like a band being tightened around the head. These headaches are usually temporary, lasting one to several hours. *Chronic* headaches of this type are caused by sustained muscle contraction and may last weeks to months. Occasionally, muscle contraction headaches may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and blurred vision.

I.D. Key

Muscle contraction headaches tend to come on gradually and leave slowly, whereas vascular headaches typically have a well-defined beginning and end.

Vascular Headaches

Vascular headaches are believed to occur when blood vessels in the head constrict and then dilate, causing a sudden increase in blood flow that irritates the surrounding nerves. The result is a pounding, throbbing headache. This theory has been a topic of debate for years, although there is no doubt that people who suffer from this type of headache have a vascular instability that makes them more susceptible to sudden, dramatic changes in blood flow. People who get vascular headaches also tend to have an exaggerated response to stimuli such as light and sound, which may contribute to the development of vascular headaches.

Migraines

Migraines are a type of vascular headache characterized by nausea, vomiting, dizziness, blurred vision, lightheadedness, and increased sensitivity to light and sound. The pain is usually severe and isolated to one side of the head and may last hours to days. Those who have migraines are often compelled to lie down in a dark, quiet room until

the pain subsides. Their hands and feet can become very cold and may even appear blue due to blood vessel spasms.

Migraines most commonly begin to occur between the ages of 10 and 30 and stop suddenly after age 50, or after menopause in women. They affect approximately 15 to 20 percent of men and 25 to 30 percent of women.

How a migraine develops is still mostly speculation. In theory, migraines are caused by the release of neurotransmitters and other chemicals that promote inflammation and pain. They can be initiated by food allergies, chemical sensitivities, hypoglycemia, poor sleep (too much or too little), alcohol consumption, stress, weather changes, overexposure to the sun, and vasoactive substances that influence blood vessel constriction or dilation, such as estrogen. Migraines in women are often associated with hormonal changes and may appear regularly at a specific point during the menstrual cycle.

The neurotransmitter serotonin is a major factor in migraines; when it's released, serotonin causes a cascade of events leading to the clumping of platelets, inflammation, vascular constriction, decreased circulation, rebound dilation, and the release of substance P, a chemical that also initiates and reinforces an inflammatory response.

Some people experience prodromal symptoms, called an aura, 10 to 30 minutes before a migraine begins. A typical aura includes blurred vision, confused or disordered thinking, numbness or tingling on one side of the body, and exhaustion. Other people experience personality changes, fluid retention, appetite changes, food cravings, or feelings of exceptional well-being 1 or 2 days before a migraine.

If you have frequent migraines, make every effort to identify any prodromal symptoms you may have. Keeping track of your daily habits, feelings, and physical well-being for several months may help you identify a pattern of symptoms that signals an imminent migraine. Recognizing your prodromal symptoms enables you to take action to avoid a full-blown attack.

Toxic Headaches

Toxic headaches are another type of vascular headache and are associated with dilation of blood vessels throughout the body. Certain

infections, including measles, mumps, tonsillitis, and pneumonia, cause fever and inflammation and can lead to a toxic headache. Some people develop toxic headaches after exposure to certain chemicals such as nitrites, monosodium glutamate, alcohol, lead, insecticides, chemical solvents, spray adhesives, rubber cement, and inks. Toxic headaches cause intense pain similar to that of migraines.

Cluster Headaches

Considered the most painful of headaches, cluster headaches are much rarer than migraines. As the name implies, they occur in clusters — occurring for an hour or so, subsiding, then returning for another hour — that can last from a few days to several months. Sometimes this cycle repeats several times a day. The pain is sharp, boring, intense, and on one side of the head, typically behind or around one eye. The pain can be so severe that it causes restlessness and agitation, driving the victim to pace in an attempt to find relief.

Unlike migraines, cluster headaches are more common in men. They usually begin to occur in a person's late 20s or 30s and occur less often after the mid-60s. Studies have shown that the typical victim is a Type A male, between the ages of 30 and 50, hardworking and ambitious, with coarse facial skin and hazel eyes.

There may be a genetic predisposition to cluster headaches, and alcohol and nicotine use can increase the odds of developing them.

Hypertensive Headaches

Hypertensive headaches are initiated by dangerous increases in blood pressure and require prompt medical attention. Symptoms of a hypertensive headache are severe throbbing pain that becomes worse with exertion, holding one's breath, or bending over.

Caution: If you suffer from hypertension, you should not rely on headache symptoms to notify you of an increase in blood pressure. Very high blood pressure can occur without any symptoms at all.

Mixed-Type Headaches

Mixed headaches have features of both muscle contraction and vascular headaches. They are often chronic and vary widely in severity and frequency. People with mixed-type headaches often rely on analgesic medication for pain control. This tactic can backfire, however; medication rebound headaches — which can be caused by the vascular and chemical changes induced by the medication, especially by those that contain caffeine — may occur when the medication wears off.

Traction or Inflammatory Headaches

Diseases or abnormalities of the structures of the head (e.g., teeth, sinuses, arteries, nerves) can stimulate painful stretching (traction) or compression in these areas, which can trigger an inflammatory cascade. The pain is variable but often becomes increasingly severe until steps are taken to correct the source of the pain.

What Triggers a Headache?

Factors that influence or provoke a headache are called triggers. While triggers do not necessarily cause a headache by themselves, they can increase the frequency or severity of headaches. Identifying your triggers is the first step toward preventing headaches.

Stress

Stress comes in all forms — mental, emotional, and physical. Whatever its cause, stress is translated into a chemical message sent throughout the body by way of neurotransmitters. These stress chemicals can both help and harm us.

When the body thinks that it faces danger, the adrenal glands release neurotransmitters, called catecholamines, that sound an alarm — the classic fight-or-flight response. Blood flow to the arms and legs is inhibited while circulation to the life-sustaining internal organs takes priority. Digestion is slowed, breathing and heart rate are increased, and stored energy is released. This fight-or-flight response quickens reflexes, sharpens thinking, and enhances awareness. Your body's resources are mobilized.

However, catecholamines become unhealthy when your body is exposed to them on a chronic basis. Living in a perpetual fight-or-flight mode — as if every moment of the day is a life-threatening event — exhausts the body's resources and contributes to the factors that cause headaches. For example, catecholamines cause the body to release serotonin, the same neurotransmitter that is thought to cause migraines. They also trigger the inflammatory response that leads to vasoconstriction, decreased blood flow, rebound vasodilation, and the release of substance P. And that leads to pain.

Injuries

Injuries, especially to the head or neck, can cause chronic headaches. Usually these headaches are of the muscle contraction type and are relieved with resolution of the muscle spasm. Post-traumatic migraine syndrome, however, can follow a concussion or head injury and may last for months to years. Head injuries have also been known to precipitate cluster headaches in susceptible individuals.

Muscle Tension

Stress can also make people adopt postures — breathing into the upper chest, clenching the jaw, and holding the head forward — that cause sustained muscle contractions in the head and neck. These contractions then lead to headaches. Other common muscle tensions that can cause headaches include:

- **Squinting and scrunching up eye muscles to read.** Over time, this creates pain behind your eyes and down your neck. Proper lighting, a comfortable reading position, and corrective lenses when needed will eradicate these headaches.
- **Spinal misalignment.** A spinal misalignment, especially in your neck, can impinge on a nerve or blood vessel and cause inflammation and pain. A misalignment may also create chronic muscle tension as your body attempts to compensate for the imbalance.
- **A sedentary lifestyle or a desk job.** Both usually go hand in hand with poor posture, which leads to tense muscles and headaches.
- **Flat feet or knee or hip problems.** All can cause muscle tension as you try to compensate for them.
- **Habitually carrying a heavy briefcase, wearing your purse over one shoulder, or placing a thick wallet in your back pocket.** All cause unhealthy postures that create imbalance and cause chronic muscle tension.

Poor Digestion

Poor digestion can be caused by many factors, including stress, inadequate amounts of digestive enzymes, and a high-fat, highly refined diet. A chronically stressed-out body provides only minimal digestive function. It fails to produce sufficient mucus to protect the intestinal lining and seldom secretes enough digestive enzymes to properly digest food. The digestive tract must then contend with larger-than-normal food particles, which irritate the intestinal lining.

Eventually, this irritation wreaks havoc throughout the body. The intestinal lining becomes inflamed, and the cells that control the passage of nutrients from the intestines to the bloodstream leak, allowing unusually large food particles to cross the intestinal barrier into the bloodstream. Unfortunately, instead of recognizing these particles as nutrients, the immune system identifies them as foreign invaders and attacks them, creating widespread inflammation. This phenomenon, known as leaky gut syndrome, can contribute to a variety of conditions in the body, including allergies, arthritis, migraines, and chronic headaches.

Food Allergies

Food allergies and sensitivities can also cause headaches. Like leaky gut syndrome, allergies precipitate inflammation and vasoconstriction and cause the release of catecholamines, histamine, and serotonin. Some foods, such as chocolate and red wine, cause sensitivity reactions because they contain vasoactive chemicals, which directly influence the constriction and dilation of blood vessels. In addition to headache, symptoms of sensitivities can include a flushed face, increased heart rate, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, cramping, mood changes, fatigue, and rash.

Foods That Can Trigger Migraines

- Alcohol (especially red wine)
- Cheese (especially aged cheeses)
- Chocolate

- Coffee
- Corn
- Cow’s milk
- Cured meats
- Eggs
- Fish
- Grapes
- Onions
- Oranges
- Peanuts
- Pork
- Rye products
- Soy
- Tomatoes
- Wheat

Skipping Meals and Dieting

Low blood sugar, known as hypoglycemia, is often the culprit behind headaches. Skipping meals, going too long without eating, adhering to low-calorie diets, or even sleeping in on the weekends can result in a dip in blood sugar, which causes blood vessels to dilate and can spark a headache.

Hormonal Changes

There’s a strong association between hormonal cycles and headaches in women. Rising and falling estrogen levels are thought to be the precipitating factor, since migraines in women often begin at puberty and taper off after menopause.

Weather Changes

Chronic headache sufferers claim that severe winds (e.g., the Santa Ana winds) or the low barometric pressure that precedes a storm can initiate a headache. Although formal studies had mixed success in confirming these assertions, researchers have found an association between increased headaches and the seasons, with spring and autumn having the highest frequency of headaches.

Keep a Headache Diary

Headaches are typically diagnosed and treated according to their signs and symptoms. Keeping a record of your headaches will help you figure out what kind of headaches you have. Then you can look for any patterns or triggers that you can modify or avoid. Here are some of the things to record in your headache diary:

- Date of headache
- Warning symptoms *(visual disturbances, flashing lights, and so on)*
- When did it start?
- How long did it last?
- Intensity *(mild, moderate, severe)*
- Other symptoms *(nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light or noise, and so on)*
- Triggers *(emotions, diet, illness, medications, and so on)*
- Medications taken for headache?
- Relief *(use a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being no relief and 10 being complete relief)*
- Other actions taken for headache *(sleeping, lying down, cold compress, and so on)*
- Relief *(1 to 10, as above)*
- Other comments

How to Prevent Headaches

Headaches are a symptom of distress. Learn to listen to the messages your body sends you, and be willing to act on them. Identifying and eliminating triggers is the first step in prevention. This approach requires a little experimentation and detective work, but the consequent reduction in headaches will make your efforts worthwhile.

Start with the gentlest, least invasive therapy — for example, drinking more water, including more essential fatty acids in your diet, reading with more light, or sleeping with a lavender-filled dream pillow. You may find that it's just the gentle nudge your body needs to reestablish balance on its own.

Following are tips and advice for lifestyle and nutritional changes that will prevent headaches. You may find that some of the ideas focus more on adopting a healthy lifestyle than eliminating or "fixing" headache triggers. This is the natural approach to health care. A healthy lifestyle generates a sense of well-being. This is the cornerstone of good health.

Learn to Brake

Learning to say no can make the difference between dysfunctional stress and a healthy sense of well-being. Listen to your body's cues, and be willing to put on the brakes when you've had enough. Attending to your life with care will help you sift away the clutter and keep what's essential. Let go of mind-numbing activities or pursuits that leave you feeling empty. Take time each day to do something nurturing for yourself. Remember to breathe deeply.

Practice Good Posture

Your body is designed to move with grace and ease while providing you with a base of strength and stability. A healthy posture consists of a

spine whose gentle curves are supported by well-toned muscles. A rigid upright stance, such as the classic military posture, is not necessarily healthy because it requires a lot of muscle tension to maintain it. Good posture comes from having adequate energy and the proper structural alignment to stand tall and relaxed at the same time. Your head should be straight, your shoulders dropped and slightly back. Your pelvis should be gently tucked in, and your knees slightly bent.

Your body is the vehicle that allows you to receive and experience the world, as well as express yourself in it. Respecting your physical limitations and recognizing imbalances or strain will guide you toward better posture and body mechanics.

Drink Filtered Water

Staying well hydrated ensures that your body has the fluids it needs to function at its best. Drink at least 8 ounces of water each day, and be sure that the water you drink is clean and filtered. Tap water can contain chemicals, metals, organisms, and toxins that place a burden on your immune system and contribute to overall inflammation, which, in turn, may contribute to the development of headaches.

Avoid Foods and Chemicals That Zap Your Blood Vessels

Avoiding vasoactive chemicals, food allergens, and other known dietary triggers is key to headache prevention. Some foods are inherently pro-inflammatory, meaning that they trigger an inflammatory cascade in sensitive individuals. Dairy products, red meat, chicken, refined and processed foods, alcohol, sugar, preservatives, additives, and artificial coloring are the most common pro-inflammatory items in the typical American diet. You may find that by reducing the amount of these foods in your diet, and thus reducing inflammation in general, your immune system will be less likely to respond as strongly to allergens.

Additives That Can Trigger Migraines

Food additives can trigger migraines in those who are sensitive to them. The additives you're most likely to have a reaction to are:

- Benzoic acid
- Monosodium glutamate
- Sulfites
- Tartrazine

Don't Skip Meals

Eat regularly scheduled meals, and avoid prolonged periods of fasting during the day. Regular meals keep your blood sugar stable, which cuts down on your risk of a headache.

Test for Food Allergies

If you suspect that diet plays a role in your headaches, ask your health care provider to test you for allergies. Most headache-causing food allergies are "immediate sensitivity" reactions, which means that you'll develop a headache within minutes to hours after eating the offending food. A simple "skin scratch" test, called RAST (Radioallergosorbent test), may be helpful in uncovering foods that trigger headaches.

Elimination Diets

A simple and accurate method of determining food sensitivities is to perform an elimination trial. Completely eliminate all sources of the suspected food from your diet for a period of 10 to 14 days. During that time, observe any changes in the frequency or severity of your headaches. On the 11th (or 15th) day, reintroduce the food at each meal. Do not eat it again for 3 days. During those 3 days, watch for any signs of a reaction (e.g., headache, flushing, or changes in digestion, mood, or energy).

If you think that you are allergic to many foods, try following a hypoallergenic diet. Eliminate all the suspected foods and most

common allergens, including all colorings, preservatives, and additives. Again, observe what happens to your pattern of headaches. Try introducing the suspected foods back into your diet one at a time, with a 3-day waiting period inbetween. Should you experience a sensitivity reaction, taking 1,000 mg buffered vitamin C immediately may help minimize the symptoms.

Caution: Do not perform this test if you have a history of anaphylaxis or other extreme allergic responses, as you may be at risk for a severe reaction.

Supplement Your Diet with Headache-Fighting Nutrients

In addition to avoiding dietary headache triggers, adding to your diet those foods and nutrients that arrest headache onset or minimize inflammation can give you a leg up on headache treatment.

Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs)

How they work: EFAs are anti-inflammatory oils that tend to be deficient in the typical American diet. These oils help decrease inflammation and reduce platelet aggregation. Hormone-related headaches may be significantly improved with the addition of EFAs to the diet.

Natural sources: EFAs are found in cold-water fish (e.g., salmon, halibut, sardines), walnuts, almonds, flax seeds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and sesame seeds. Evening primrose oil, black currant oil, and borage oil are also excellent sources.

Supplement dosage: Take 1,000 mg of EFAs derived from evening primrose, black currant, or borage oil two to three times daily. Be sure to keep these fragile oils away from light and heat.

Vitamin C

How it works: Vitamin C stabilizes those cells that release vasoactive histamines and initiate the inflammatory cascade. It is especially beneficial for those headaches triggered by food allergies or chemical

sensitivities and vascular instability.

Natural sources: Orange juice, peppers, watermelon, papaya, strawberries, broccoli, and tomatoes are good sources of vitamin C.

Supplement dosage: Take 250 to 1,000 mg three times a day, before meals. Use preparations containing bioflavonoids, such as rose hips, to increase vitamin C's effectiveness.

B Vitamins

How they work: B vitamins can be depleted in times of stress; vitamin B_6, in particular, is often deficient in migraine sufferers. Vitamin B_6 helps disable and break down histamine, a benefit in allergy-related headaches. It is also an important cofactor in estrogen metabolism, making it useful in treating headaches with a hormonal influence.

Natural sources: The best sources of vitamin B_6 are fish, chicken, pork, eggs, whole-grain cereals, and legumes.

Supplement dosage: Take a B-complex supplement that includes 50 mg of vitamin B_6 one or two times a day.

Vitamin E

How it works: Vitamin E prevents platelets from clumping together and inhibits the release of pro-inflammatory chemicals. Vitamin E is also involved in estrogen metabolism.

Natural sources: Nuts, seeds, yams, and dark leafy greens (e.g., spinach and kale) contain high amounts of vitamin E.

Supplement dosage: Take 200 to 400 IU of *d*-alpha-tocopherol per day. Avoid *dl*-alpha-tocopherol, which is a synthetic form of vitamin E that is not well absorbed by the body.

Magnesium

How it works: Magnesium is a muscle relaxer that helps relieve muscle tension and restore normal vascular tone, which is especially important in relieving migraines. Also, like vitamins B_6 and E, magnesium is a cofactor in estrogen metabolism and should be included in the treatment of hormone-related headaches.

Natural sources: Foods high in magnesium include purslane, almonds, green beans, poppy seeds, oats, kale, spinach, and blackstrap molasses.

Supplement dosage: Take 200 mg two or three times daily. When poorly absorbed, magnesium can cause diarrhea. If this should occur, decrease the amount of magnesium or switch to another preparation.

5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan)

How it works: 5-HTP helps normalize serotonin activity and reduce the frequency and severity of both muscle contraction and vascular headaches.

Natural sources: 5-HTP is found primarily in milk and turkey.

Supplement dosage: Take 100 mg two or three times daily. Best results are seen after 2 months of consistent use.

Twelve Herbs for Beating Headaches

Besides adding beauty and fragrance to our gardens, many herbs have constituents that are beneficial in the treatment of headaches. Doctors have known this since they first discovered salicylic acid and began selling it as aspirin. In fact, aspirin derives its name from Spiraea, the former botanical name for meadowsweet. *A-Spiraea* means "from meadowsweet."

Herbs are best used for strengthening the body as a whole, not simply for treating headaches. They make the body more resilient and better able to withstand the stress of pain and illness.

The herbs discussed here are generally considered to be mild and safe for use by both children and adults. But our biochemical individuality makes it impossible to predict all variations of side effects. So when you use an herb, pay attention to your body's response, and discontinue it if you experience any adverse effects. A strong adverse reaction, such as a headache or nausea, may signal an allergy; if you experience a strong adverse reaction, immediately consult a health practitioner.

Herbal Medicine Glossary

Analgesic: provides pain relief when taken internally

Anodyne: provides pain relief when applied topically

Anti-inflammatory: reduces inflammation by inhibiting the release of pro-inflammatory chemicals or helping to process the products of inflammation

Antispasmodic: releases tension and spasm; relieves cramping

Bitter: stimulates the release of digestive enzymes and enhances digestion

Carminative: relaxes the stomach and relieves spasm in the intestinal tract

Diaphoretic: increases peripheral circulation and warms the

extremities, often inducing perspiration

Hepatic: provides liver support, which aids in digestion and hormone metabolism

Hypnotic: helps induce a normal state of sleep

Nervine: soothes nervous tension and encourages relaxation without sedation

Relaxant: promotes relaxation

Sedative: decreases pain and nervous irritability by inhibiting central nervous system function

Stimulant: increases functional activity and energy

Stomachic: protects and strengthens the overall function of the upper gastrointestinal tract

Tonic: strengthens a specific organ or a general system, making it more resilient and adaptable to challenges

Vasodilator: causes the blood vessels to widen

Cayenne Pepper (*Capsicum* spp.)

Parts used: Fruit

Actions: Anodyne, carminative, stimulant

Medicinal uses: Cayenne pepper and other hot peppers contain capsaicin, a compound that inhibits the release of substance P. Like meadowsweet, cayenne contains salicylate compounds. Cayenne has a powerful stimulating effect on the circulatory system throughout the body. For headaches related to vasospasm, constriction, and feelings of cold, cayenne is a fast-acting, warming remedy.

Dosage: Cayenne is most often used in combination with other herbs. Alone, it is very powerful and should be used sparingly. Adults should take 15 drops of tincture in ¼ cup warm water three times a day. Cayenne is not recommended on its own for children.

Caution: Cayenne contains salicylate compounds and should not be given to children with viral infections, as there is an associated risk of developing Reye’s syndrome. If you are using aspirin or blood-thinning treatments, consult your health care practitioner before using cayenne.

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*)

Parts used: Leaf

Actions: Anti-inflammatory, relaxant, vasodilatory

Medicinal uses: Feverfew has long been used to prevent migraines. Its botanical name makes reference to its parthenolide content. Parthenolides inhibit the release of serotonin from platelets, normalize platelet function, and reduce inflammation.

Dosage: Best results are achieved by eating 1 to 4 leaves a day. You can also take feverfew in capsule form, 60 to 380 mg of fresh or powdered leaf or 25 mg of freeze-dried leaf once or twice a day. A tea made from 2 to 8 leaves steeped in 1 cup of boiling water is also effective; adults can drink this tea once or twice a day. Feverfew is not recommended on its own for children.

Caution: Pregnant women should avoid feverfew. In addition, fever-few can cause mouth ulcers and inflammation. If these occur, discontinue using the herb.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

Parts used: Rhizome

Actions: Anodyne, carminative

Medicinal uses: Ginger is a warming herb that settles an upset stomach and increases peripheral circulation. If taken at the very first sign of a migraine, ginger may stop its progression. Ginger root may also alleviate withdrawal symptoms that occur when discontinuing ergotamine medications for migraines.

Dosage: Best results are obtained from the fresh root. Grate a ¼-inch slice of fresh ginger root and simmer in 1 cup of water for 10 to 20 minutes. Adults may drink 2 to 4 cups a day. Children often object to ginger's spicy taste, but it can be made more palatable by mixing it with juice or other teas. A child's dose is ¼ to ½ cup two or three times a day.

Jamaican Dogwood (*Piscidia erythrina*)

Parts used: Stem and bark

Actions: Analgesic, hypnotic, sedative

Medicinal uses: Acting on the nervous system, Jamaican dogwood is useful in the treatment of nerve pain and migraines, especially when sleep is disturbed due to pain. It combines well with other sedative herbs for alleviating pain related to spasm and nerve irritation.

Dosage: Make a decoction by steeping 1 heaping teaspoon of Jamaican dogwood in 1 cup of boiling water. Adults may drink 1 to 3 cups of tea a day. The tincture is also effective; adults may take 30 to 60 drops three times a day.

Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*)

Parts used: Flowers

Actions: Antispasmodic, carminative

Medicinal uses: Lavender's beauty and fragrance alone are enough to ease tension and depression in some people. It is especially useful in states of nervous exhaustion and restless insomnia. That's why lavender is often a key ingredient in herbal sleep pillows. A bowl of dried lavender flowers on your nightstand can subtly scent the air. Lavender warms and settles a nervous stomach and helps make the nervous system more resilient and able to withstand adversity.

Dosage: Lavender is excellent as a tea; infuse 1 teaspoon of the dried flowers in 1 cup of water. The adult dosage is 1 cup two or three times a day; children may take ½ cup twice a day.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Parts used: Leaves and flowers

Actions: Antispasmodic, carminative, diaphoretic

Medicinal uses: Lemon balm is a powerful but gentle herb that releases spasms throughout the body and mind. The lemony scent from its volatile oils is instrumental in lifting melancholy spirits and relieving the effects of stress. It is especially useful for headaches that are accompanied by a nervous stomach and anxiety or depression.

Dosage: To make a tea, infuse 1 heaping teaspoon of lemon balm in 1 cup of water. Adults may take up to 3 cups a day; a child's dose is ½ cup three times a day.

Caution: Lemon balm is a mild inhibitor of thyroid-stimulating

hormone. Those with low thyroid (hypothyroid) conditions or those taking thyroid medications should consult with their health care practitioners before using lemon balm.

Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

Parts used: Herb and flower

Actions: Anti-inflammatory, stomachic

Medicinal uses: Meadowsweet is one of those wonderful paradoxes that illustrate the uncanny wisdom of nature. Meadowsweet is a rich source of salicylates, those compounds found in aspirin that have been implicated in gastrointestinal bleeding. Unlike pharmaceutical salicylates, however, the natural plant source is less likely to cause bleeding. In fact, meadowsweet is one of the best remedies for digestive disorders and ulcerations. It reduces pain and inflammation and settles the stomach. Use meadowsweet for headaches associated with nausea and digestive upset.

Dosage: Infuse 1 heaping teaspoon of the dried herb in 1 cup of water. Adults may take 1 cup of tea three times a day; children may take ½ cup twice a day. Meadowsweet tincture is also effective. Adults may take 30 drops of the tincture three times a day; a child's dose is 15 drops of the tincture twice a day.

Caution: Meadowsweet contains salicylate compounds and should not be given to children with viral infections, as there is an associated risk of developing Reye's syndrome. If you are using aspirin or blood-thinning treatments, consult with your health care practitioner before using meadowsweet.

Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*)

Parts used: Dried leaves

Actions: Anodyne, antispasmodic, hypnotic, sedative

Medicinal uses: Passionflower is a striking climbing plant with an extravagant purple flower. Its dramatic presentation provides stark contrast to its gentle and subtle action. Like a deep sigh, passion-flower is soothing to the nervous system, melting tension in its wake and leaving behind a sense of deep relaxation. Although it can be used

effectively on its own to reduce stress, passionflower also combines well with other herbs to promote relaxation and pain relief.

Dosage: To make a tea for adults, infuse 1 teaspoon of the dried leaves in 1 cup of water. Adults may drink 1 cup of tea before bedtime to relieve insomnia; for anxiety and nervousness, adults should drink 1 cup of tea twice a day. To make a tea for children, infuse ½ teaspoon of the dried leaves in 1 cup of water. Children may take 1 to 2 cups of tea a day.

Skullcap (*Scutellaria laterifolia*)

Parts used: Herb

Actions: Antispasmodic, nervine tonic, sedative

Medicinal uses: Skullcap is a wonderful herb to use for nervous conditions, because it releases excess tension while reviving and toning the nervous system. It is best used in combination with other anti-spasmodic herbs to address anxiety and depression related to pain.

Dosage: To make a tea, infuse 1 heaping teaspoon of dried herb in 1 cup of water. Adults may drink 1 cup of this tea two or three times a day. Skullcap can also be taken as a tincture; adults may take 30 to 60 drops two or three times a day.

Caution: In rare cases, skullcap has caused a worsening of symptoms. If you have had adverse reactions to herbs or paradoxical reactions to medications (e.g., taking a sedative and becoming more anxious) in the past, you may want to avoid skullcap.

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

Parts used: Root

Actions: Antispasmodic, carminative, hypnotic, sedative

Medicinal uses: Valerian is a foul-smelling herb that is absolutely irresistible to rodents. Despite its unpleasant odor, valerian is a powerful herb for relieving insomnia as well as pain and spasm, especially related to the digestive tract.

Dosage: Because of its potent odor, valerian is most easily taken in tincture form. Adults may take 30 to 60 drops of tincture before bedtime to relieve insomnia or two or three times a day to relieve pain and

spasm.

Caution: Although valerian is traditionally used for insomnia, some people experience a paradoxical effect and are stimulated by it. If you are one of those people in whom medications often have the opposite effect, be cautious when using valerian.

Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*)

Parts used: Herb and flower

Actions: Antispasmodic, diaphoretic, hepatic, nervine tonic, sedative

Medicinal uses: Vervain acts as a tonic on the nervous system, relieving excesses and promoting a state of calm alertness. Its diaphoretic properties increase peripheral circulation, which can help alleviate the cold extremities that sometimes accompany migraines. Hormone-related headaches, as well as those associated with depressive or anxious states, may also benefit from vervain.

Dosage: To make a tea, infuse 1 to 2 teaspoons of dried herb in 1 cup of water. Adults may take 1 cup of tea three times a day; children may take ½ cup of tea two or three times a day.

Wood Betony (*Stachys betonica*)

Parts used: Dried herb

Actions: Nervine tonic, sedative, bitter

Medicinal uses: Like skullcap and vervain, wood betony nourishes the nervous system while alleviating undue tension in the body. Because of its bitter taste, wood betony can be used to enhance digestion as well. Headaches related to stress, hormonal changes, and nervous exhaustion respond well to combinations including wood betony.

Dosage: To make a tea, infuse 1 heaping teaspoon of herb in 1 cup of water. Adults may take 1 cup of tea three times a day or 30 to 60 drops of tincture two or three times a day. Children may take ½ cup of tea or 15 to 20 drops of tincture twice daily.

A Quick Guide to Herbal Relief

If you suspect that your headache is related to one of the following

problems, consider using one of the herbs listed to get relief. The herbs are listed in order of strength of action. The last herb in each category is no less effective than the first, but it should be used

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Allergies and leaky gut syndrome: meadowsweet, feverfew, valerian, lemon balm

Anxiety: skullcap, lavender, passionflower, lemon balm

Cold extremities: cayenne pepper, ginger, feverfew, vervain

Depression or melancholy: skullcap, wood betony, vervain, lavender, lemon balm

Hormone imbalance: vervain, wood betony, lavender when a more gentle effect is desired, such as when treating children. For detailed information about each herb — how much of it to use and in what form — consult the individual herb descriptions on pages 16–22.

Insomnia: valerian, passionflower, lavender

Muscle spasm: Jamaican dogwood, valerian, cayenne pepper, skullcap, lavender, lemon balm

Nausea: ginger, meadowsweet, wood betony

Nervous exhaustion: vervain, skullcap, wood betony, lavender

Nervous stomach: valerian, passionflower, lemon balm, lavender

Pain: Jamaican dogwood, feverfew, meadowsweet, cayenne pepper, ginger

Using Herbs to Feel Better Fast

Because headache types have so much in common, the herbal remedies recommended are generalized to address a wide variety of complaints. For best results, use a preparation daily for six to eight weeks. Acute formulas — designed for symptoms that come on suddenly or for headaches in progress — may be used whenever needed. Consult an experienced health care practitioner if your headaches are persistent or increase in severity.

Teas versus Tinctures

When using herbs for headaches, it's best to take a multifaceted approach. Long-term overall support, which is the foundation of comprehensive headache treatment, is generally accomplished with teas, whose healing effects build up gradually over time. For headaches that are complicated by other factors, such as insomnia or anxiety, tinctures (alcohol extracts) may achieve results more quickly than teas.

Fast pain relief typically requires higher doses of herbs than can be obtained through teas. Again, tinctures may be more useful here, as they provide extracts in doses so concentrated that they are measured in drops instead of cups. Tinctures also have the benefit of being easily transportable. They can be stowed away in a purse or backpack and do not require boiling water, cups, and tea strainers. However, the very fact that teas take time and effort to prepare can add to their therapeutic value. I often prescribe teas to clients precisely because slowing down and establishing a healing ritual is what they need for their well-being.

Soothing with Scent

Baths and steams are also excellent ways to incorporate the healing power of herbs. Whether sinking into a warm tub at the end of the day, soaking your feet in a basin of hot water, or making a tent over a steaming pot, you can benefit from hydrotherapy by inhaling the herbal

vapors and surrendering to the warming and antigravity effects of water. When vaporized by heat, herbs release fragrant volatile oils called essential oils. When inhaled, essential oils have a direct influence on the limbic system of the brain. This part of the brain is the most primitive and is considered to be one of the emotional centers of the brain. Our most basic instincts, including the fight-or-flight response, mobilize the limbic system. Inhaling certain herbal fragrances, such as lavender and lemon balm, can induce a feeling of calm and relaxation, as well as alleviate discomfort and pain.

Essential oils can also provide pain relief when they are used topically. Applying herbal preparations to the skin initiates an immediate localized reaction that gradually ripples throughout the body. But volatile oils are highly concentrated and can cause skin irritation when used alone. Always dilute them with a carrier oil such as olive, sesame seed, or almond oil before applying them to the skin. Use about 5 drops of essential oil for every 4 teaspoons of carrier oil.

Primal Scents

The sense of smell is the most primitive of the senses; our distant ancestors relied on their acute sense of smell to alert them to danger. Odors are imprinted on our memories, both good and unpleasant, with powerful attachment. It's been almost 20 years since I was last in my grandmother's kitchen, yet I have only to walk by a bakery and catch the wafting fragrance of freshly baked bread to be transported back to the soothing comfort I felt there. This effect can also be used therapeutically to induce relaxation at will. Choose a favorite fragrance or one of the volatile oils and use it whenever you employ a relaxation technique, such as meditation, biofeedback, or soaking in a bath. With time and practice, you will be able to use that scent to induce a sense of relaxation and peace whenever you sniff it.

Making and Using Herbal Teas

There are two ways to prepare herbal tea. You can make an infusion, in

which the herb is steeped, or you can make a decoction, in which the plant matter is simmered over time. It is not necessary to drink tea warm; in fact, drinking it cool is recommended to avoid promoting vasodilation or contraction.

Infusions. To extract medicinal properties from leaves, flowers, berries, or seeds, you infuse them. Pour 1 cup of boiling water over 1 heaping teaspoon of dried herbs or 2 tablespoons of fresh herbs. (If you're using berries or seeds, crush them first.) Cover, let steep 10 to 15 minutes, strain, and drink.

Decoctions. Decoctions are made by simmering root, bark, and other woody parts of the plant to extract their medicinal properties. Add 1 heaping teaspoon of dried root to 1 cup of water. Cover, bring to a boil, then simmer 15 to 20 minutes. Strain the herbs and enjoy.

Combinations. When you're making a tea with both roots and leaves, you both infuse and decoct: Simmer the roots 20 minutes, remove from the heat, add the leaves and stir, then cover and steep 10 to 20 minutes longer.

What's "Herb"?

Herb means the aerial parts of a plant — not just the leaves but the entire aboveground plant.

MUSCLE CONTRACTION TONIC TEA

Use this formula when muscle contraction headaches become chronic. By relaxing tension and restoring the nervous system, these herbs help reduce the frequency and severity of headaches.

- **2 parts passionflower leaves**
- **2 parts skullcap herb**
- **1 part lemon balm leaves**
- **1 part vervain herb and flower**

Infuse the ingredients, following the instructions above. Drink between

meals and before bed, 2 to 3 cups daily.

Tonics and Toning

Tonics help tone a system, which means that they restore normal function and balance and enhance overall health. Tonics are best taken as teas for long-term use. Although you should begin to notice a difference after several days, maximum benefit may not be achieved for six to eight weeks.

VASCULAR HEADACHE TONIC TEA

This formula can benefit chronic vascular headaches and mixed-type headaches. These herbs inhibit pain-producing compounds and release vasospasm.

- **2 parts feverfew leaves**
- **1 part lavender flowers**
- **1 part meadowsweet herb and flower**
- **1 part valerian root**
- **1 part wood betony herb**

Infuse the herbs, following the instructions on page 25. Drink before meals, 2 to 3 cups daily.

STRESS RELIEF TONIC

Use this tea when stress is the primary precipitating factor for your headaches, especially when it is accompanied by nervousness and unsettled digestion. This formula is gentle enough to give to children.

- **1 part lavender flowers**
- **1 part lemon balm leaves**
- **1 part passionflower leaves**

- **1 part vervain herb and flower**

Infuse the herbs, following the instructions on page 25. Drink before meals and at bedtime; adults may take 1 cup two or three times a day; children should be limited to ½ cup two or three times a day.

To treat anxiety or extreme stress, this formula can be made into a tincture. Simply combine tinctures of the herbs in the proportions given. Adults may take 10 to 15 drops as needed; children may take 10 drops two or three times a day.

HORMONAL HEADACHE RELIEF

Use this formula for headaches that occur during hormonal transitions, especially premenstrual, menstrual, and perimenopausal headaches.

- **1 part ginger root**
- **2 parts Jamaican dogwood stem and bark**
- **1 part lavender flowers**
- **1 part vervain herb and flower**
- **1 part wood betony herb**

Make an infusion, following the instructions on page 25. Drink 3 to 4 cups of tea a day.

To make a tincture: Combine tinctures of the herbs in the proportions listed. Take 20 to 30 drops of tincture three to four times daily. For acute pain relief, take 10 to 15 drops every 15 minutes for the first hour, then 15 to 20 drops every 30 minutes, up to 2 hours.

CHILDREN'S HEADACHE COMPOUND

This is a good basic tea for children. These gentle herbs ease spasms related to stress and nervous tension.

- **2 parts Jamaican dogwood stem and bark**
- **1 part lemon balm leaves**

- **1 part meadowsweet herb and flower**
- **2 parts ginger syrup (see the box below)**

Make an infusion of the herbs following the instructions on page 25. Stir in the ginger syrup. Children may take ¼ to ½ cup every 3 hours.

To make a tincture: Combine herb tinctures and the ginger syrup in the proportions listed. Take 10 to 15 drops every hour, as needed.

Ginger Syrup

Peel and slice a 2-inch section of raw ginger root. Place in a jar and cover completely with raw sugar, white sugar, brown sugar, succanat, or pasteurized honey. (Do not use raw honey.) Shake the jar once or twice daily for 3 days. If you are using honey, repeat this process for a total of 7 days. Strain the syrup, and store it in the refrigerator, where it will keep for up to 3 months. This syrup helps relieve headaches and settle the stomach. It can be used alone or as a base for tinctures or other preparations.

Tinctures and Glycerites

Tinctures are potent alcoholic extracts of herbs. You can mix them with a bit of hot water to dissipate the alcohol before ingesting. Glycerites are nonalcoholic extracts. They are generally sweet and more palatable to children. Tinctures and glycerites are available at most herb shops and natural foods stores. Tinctures should be stored in a cool, dark location, where they will keep for up to 2 years. Glycerites should be stored in the refrigerator, where they will keep for up to 3 months.

General dosages for tinctures and glycerites are as follows:

- **Tinctures for adults:** 30 to 60 drops two to four times daily
- **Tinctures for children:** 10 to 20 drops two to four times daily
- **Glycerites for adults:** 1 teaspoon three or four times daily
- **Glycerites for children:** ½ teaspoon three or four times daily

MUSCLE CONTRACTION HEADACHE TINCTURE

This recipe is particularly good for relieving muscle contraction headaches. Use at the first sign of pain to prevent a full-blown headache.

- **2 parts Jamaican dogwood tincture**
- **2 parts valerian root tincture**
- **1 part meadowsweet tincture**
- **1 part skullcap tincture**

Combine all ingredients. Take 15 drops of the tincture every 15 minutes for the first 8 doses (2 hours), then 30 drops every hour for up to 4 hours.

For a mild headache, take 30 to 60 drops three or four times a day.

VASCULAR HEADACHE TINCTURE

This remedy should be taken at the first sign of a migraine or other vascular headache for fast pain relief. Once a migraine has set in, herbal remedies may not be sufficiently potent to relieve it.

- **2 parts ginger root tincture**
- **2 parts Jamaican dogwood tincture**
- **1 part feverfew tincture**
- **1 part meadowsweet tincture**

Combine all ingredients. Take 15 drops of the tincture every 15 minutes for the first 8 doses (2 hours), then 30 drops every hour as needed.

For migraines or severe pain, add 1 teaspoon of cayenne tincture to each ounce of Vascular Headache Tincture.

Herbal Compresses

Hot and cold water can have powerful effects on muscle tension and circulation. Warm compresses often relieve the pain of muscle

contraction headaches, while combining hot and cold may alleviate a migraine.

HOT-COLD COMPRESS FOR MIGRAINES

This is an old naturopathic remedy for vascular headaches. The heat, accentuated by the cayenne pepper, dilates the blood vessels in the feet, enhancing the vasoconstrictive action of the cold pack on the head and drawing the blood downward, alleviating the throbbing pain in the head. This often stops a migraine in its tracks, especially if it's done at the very first sign of pain.

1 cold pack
1 basin
¼–½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper

Fill a basin with tolerably hot water (approximately ½ gallon) and stir in the cayenne pepper. Sit down in a comfortable chair. Place the cold pack on top of your head or at the back of your neck, and place your feet in the basin of warm water. Soak your feet in the water for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the water has cooled.

GINGER COMPRESS FOR MUSCLE SPASMS

Use this compress for muscle contraction headaches when the muscles of the back, shoulders, or neck are in spasm.

2 cups hot ginger tea
2 small, clean hand towels
Hot water bottle (optional)
Large bowl ice water

Pour the ginger tea into a large bowl. Saturate one hand towel with the hot ginger tea and place it over the area of muscle spasm. Placing a hot water bottle on top keeps the towel hot longer. Resoak the towel in the ginger tea as needed to keep the area hot. After 15 to 20 minutes,

remove the ginger compress. Soak the other hand towel in the bowl of ice water, wring it out well, and place it on the pre-warmed area. Leave the towel in place for 3 to 5 minutes.

You may repeat this treatment up to three times daily. This is especially useful when there is an area of chronic spasm; after two to three days of use, the occurrence of spasm should be significantly eased.

Herbal Baths

While baths are not the most efficient way to take medicine, they may be the most pleasant. If stress is taking a toll on your health and well-being, a bath can be an effective way of melting your cares away. In addition, your skin will absorb herbal constituents while you are soaking.

Bathwater should be warm and comfortable enough for relaxation; hot baths can be stimulating and should be avoided. Use soft lighting or candles. Turn off all sources of noise except for soft music, if desired. Try to avoid the temptation to read and take the opportunity to rest your eyes and surrender to total relaxation.

FRESH HERBAL BATH

Toss fresh sprigs of aromatic relaxing herbs, such as lavendar and lemon balm, into the tub, then draw a bath. The running water will agitate and heat the herbs, releasing their volatile oils. When the tub is full, remove the herbs and settle in for a 20-minute soak.

TUB TEAS

Use an old sock, stockings or oversized muslin tea bag to make your own tub tea. Fill the “tea bag” with 1 cup of dried herbs, tie it shut, and hang it over the faucet. Then let the water run through it while drawing your bath. You can also make a 1-quart infusion, following the instructions on page 25, then strain it, and add it to the tub. Herbal

combinations to try include:

- Lavender, lemon balm, and vervain, which release fragrant scents that are uplifting and relaxing
- Ginger, which stimulates circulation and provides topical pain relief for muscle spasm
- Skullcap and wood betony, which help relieve nervous exhaustion from prolonged stress

Pharmaceuticals That Block Headaches

Over-the-counter analgesic and anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and acetaminophen can relieve mild to moderate headaches. For chronic or severe headaches, however, prescription drugs may be necessary, and you may have to try a variety of them before you discover the one that works for you. These medications include antidepressants, antinausea drugs, calcium channel blockers, beta-blockers, ergotamines, narcotics, antihistamines, muscle relaxants, and tranquilizers. Unfortunately, these medications are strong and can have side effects that are almost as unpleasant as the headache itself. Use them with caution, and only as directed. Severe headaches that are not relieved with standard medications may require hospitalization and steroid treatment.

Children are more difficult to treat with pharmaceutical medications, as many of these drugs are approved for use only in adults. Never give aspirin or other salicylate-containing medications to children with influenza, chicken pox, or other viral infections. Salicylates increase a child's risk of developing Reye's syndrome, a condition that can cause brain and liver damage. Fortunately, children are generally very receptive to biofeedback and are usually quite adept at mastering relaxation techniques.

Biofeedback for Headaches

Biofeedback is a way to learn how to control the so-called involuntary activities of the body. After setting a goal that will help

relieve your headaches — altering circulation or relieving tension, for example — you're attached by electrodes to a biofeedback machine that monitors certain functions, such as respiration and heart rate. A technician guides you through a visualization to help you achieve your goal. The computerized biofeedback machine monitors your progress and gives feedback in the way of beeps or colored lights that indicate the success of your efforts. If you're less tense, for instance, your heart rate and respiration will be lower than when you started. After several sessions, you'll be able to achieve your goal without the machine. This method has been shown to be very effective in reducing the severity and frequency of both muscle contraction and vascular headaches.

Resources

Use your local health food or natural grocery store as a resource for vitamins and herbs. If you can't find what you need locally, the following mail-order suppliers may be able to help.

Herb Suppliers

Avena Botanicals
219 Mill Street
Rockport, ME 04856
(207) 594-0694

Blessed Herbs
109 Barre Plains Road
Oakham, MA 01068
(800) 489-4372

Frontier Cooperative Herbs
Box 69
Norway, IA 52318
(319) 227-7991

Herb Pharm
P.O. Box 116
Williams, OR 97544
(800) 348-4372

Sage Mountain Herbs
P.O. Box 420
East Barre, VT 05649
(802) 479-9825

Wise Woman Herbal
P.O. Box 270
Creswell, OR 97426
(800) 532-5219

Nutritional Supplement Suppliers

Enzymatic Therapies
Green Bay, WI 54311
Web site: www.enzy.com
A good source for 5-HTP. Their web site offers a search engine that will locate stores in your area that carry their products.

Pioneer Nutritional Formulas, Inc.
Shelburne Falls, MA 01370
(800) 458-8483
Web site: pioneernutritional.com
Pioneer has an excellent vitamin C supplement with bioflavonoids. Their web site offers a search engine that will locate stores in your area that carry their products.

Rainbow Light
207 McPherson Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(800) 635-1233
Rainbow Light formulates vegetarian supplements. Their products are available in most natural foods stores.

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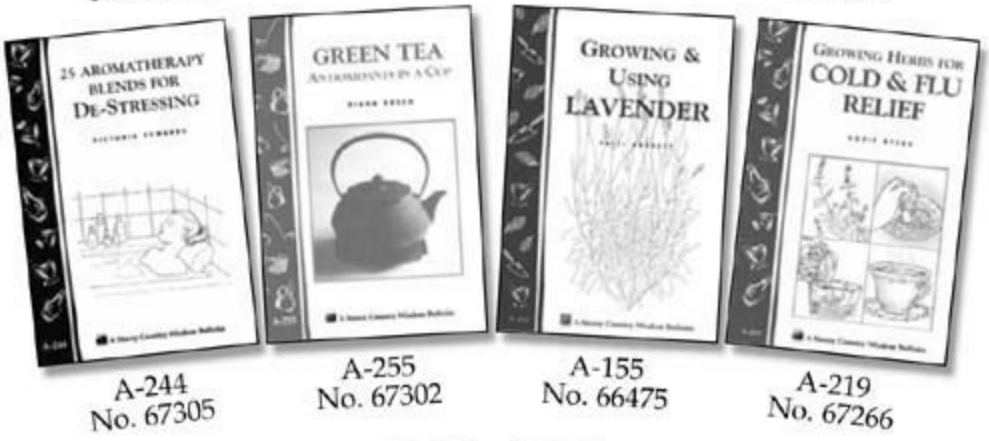

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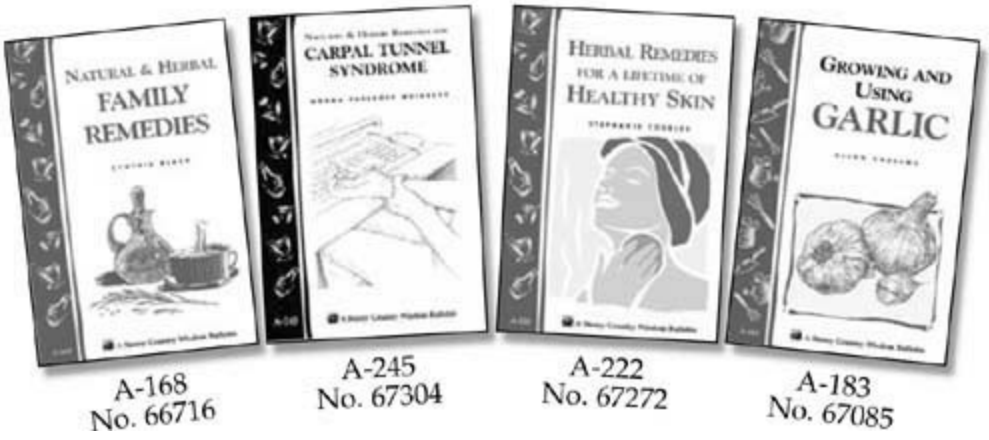
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